

SCHLAG, FELIX OSCAR

DRAWER 22

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SCULPTORS-S  
(BUSTS)



# Statues of Abraham Lincoln

Felix Oscar Schlag

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection





# Michigan Sculptor Gets His Nickel's Worth

By HERSCHEL P. FINK

Although hardly anyone recognizes his name, virtually everyone in the United States owns at least one reproduction of a sculpture by Felix Oscar Schlag.

The 74-year-old Owosso sculptor's best known work has been reproduced more than six billion times.

Anyone can obtain a copy of it for five cents.

The work is his prize-winning design for the Jefferson nickel.

## Wins \$1,000 Prize

In 1937, when the U.S. Mint held its first and only open competition for a coin design, Schlag's was judged best of 300 entries and was awarded the \$1,000 prize.

U.S. coins traditionally carry the initials of their designers, and every current U.S. coin—with one exception—so honors its creator.

That one exception has been Schlag's Jefferson nickel.

Asked why he did not initial his model in 1937 according to custom, Schlag replies modestly that, while he would have liked to, "no one asked me, and I didn't want to push."

## Belated Honor

Late last week the U.S. Mint announced that Schlag will be accorded a rare honor this summer—a running change in his coin's design to include his initials.

The recognition, 28 years belated, was the result of a campaign launched last year by Michigan coin collectors who took note of the omission. The late Senator Patrick V. McNamara and Senator Philip Hart joined Flint's U.S. Sen. John C. Mackie in ask-



**DISPLAYS HANDWORK . . . Sculptor Schlag looks over two of his works, a head of Abraham**

Lincoln and the famed Jefferson head nickel.

## Cut on Coat

A high Mint official at first told Mackie that he must be mistaken, that all coins had their designer's initials.

Quickly fishing into his pocket for an example, the official discovered that the nickel was indeed unsigned.

Miss Eva Adams, director of the U.S. Mint, made the official announcement Thursday night in a speech to a Washington, D.C., coin convention. "We at the Mint are de-

lighted that Secretary of the Treasury Fowler has signed an order which makes it possible to accord this special

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## FIRST MONTICELLO —

That is the original design that Owosso sculptor Felix Schlag submitted of his Jefferson nickel. To see how the view of Monticello, Jefferson's home, was changed, check the change in your pocket.



Lincoln and the famed Jefferson head nickel. Schlag designed the coin in 1937.

honor to Felix Schlag," Miss Adams told the collectors. "Our engraver at the Philadelphia Mint is now busy get-

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## Aug. 1 Start

ting ready to turn back a bit of the coat of Mr. Jefferson so that Mr. Schlag's initials can be placed on the 1966 and all future issues of this coin.

Miss Adams told the group that the first Schlag-initialed nickels will be produced Aug. 1, when the Mint officially switches from the 1965 date now in use to 1966 dating of coins.

Schlag, who received a telegram from the mint director, says he is excited by the honor.

"It's especially pleasing to be recognized as I get older," he says. He celebrates his 75th birthday Sept. 4.

## He's Photographer

A promising sculptor in the 1930s with a Chicago studio, Schlag abandoned sculpture with the advent of World War II and settled in Owosso, where he opened a photographic portrait studio. Recently he resumed sculpting, trying to pick up where he left off more than two decades before.

The son of a German sculptor, Schlag was born in Frankfurt am Main and studied seven years at the Royal Academy of Art in Munich. He won more than a dozen European art competitions.

In 1929, with the rise of Hitlerism, he left Germany and came to the United States. For a brief time in the 1930s he worked as an automotive stylist for General Motors in Detroit.

## Change in Design

"But I didn't fit in there," he says. "I had very big ideas—raisons in my head, as an old expression goes."

He settled in Chicago in 1934, opening a studio in a poor neighborhood.

He soon won commissions for public buildings in Illinois and New York. Then came the 1937 competition for the Jefferson nickel.

Before he could select a portrait of Jefferson as a model, he felt he had to "know" Jefferson and read widely about him.

Schlag's original reverse design showed Monticello from a side angle. President Franklin D. Roosevelt requested that it be altered to show a front view of the building.

Schlag still maintains that his first design was better, but he accepted the suggestions of the President and the Treasury.





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